

VZCZCXRO8011
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHFN #0608/01 3661514
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 311514Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2383
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000608

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: A HAZY SHADE OF INTEGRITY: SIERRA LEONE WELCOMES
GUINEAN JUNTA LEADERS

REF: A. FREETOWN 602

[1](#)B. FREETOWN 605

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) released a press report December 31, outlining President Koroma's meeting with representatives of the Guinean junta, including Vice President General Mamadouba Toto Camara on December 30. Text of the report is contained in para 2. Though, per reftel A, the GoSL claim to feel forced into hosting the Guinean contingent by Senegalese President Wade and Libyan Leader Muammar Qadhafi, this press report gives an appearance of the GoSL's tacit approval for the coup and its leaders. Considered an impressive example for democratic integrity due to the peaceful and minimally controversial 2007 and 2008 elections in the region, the GoSL missed an opportunity with this report to remind the Guineans that democratically-elected civilian rule must be an expedited priority. We have brought to the attention of State House and the Foreign Minister the importance of early elections to establish a legitimate government in Guinea. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The text of the press report, entitled "Guinean Junta Leaders Visit Sierra Leone" follows:
Members of the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD), the name for the new junta that took over in neighbouring Guinea following the death of President Lansana Conte, yesterday paid a late-evening visit to Sierra Leone to further explain to President Ernest Bai Koroma the reasons for their take-over after he visited Conakry last week for the funeral of the late Guinean leader.

Arriving at about 9 pm local time on a Republique Du Senegal, aircraft from the Liberian capital Monrovia where they had made a similar visit to President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (who was also at the funeral ceremony in Conakry last week), the delegation, led by new Vice President General Mamadouba Toto Camara, was received at the Lungi International Airport by counterpart Chief Sam Sumana who led him to the presidential lounge to have closed-door discussions with President Koroma. The Sierra Leonean leader and the visiting Vice President thereafter posed for press photographs.

This was followed by a press briefing by General Camara, introduced by Information & Communications Minister Ibrahim Ben Kargbo. In his statement to journalists, the Guinean Number Two man simplified the reasons for the military putsch, which he insisted was - a coup d'etat but a &vacancy that needed to be quickly filled in the interest of Guinea.

Speaking on behalf of junta leader Captain Moussa Dadis Camara (reportedly a UNAMSIL personnel during Sierra Leone's war), who had despatched them to &his brother, President Ernest Koroma to explain the reasons for their action, General Camara said, &a few hours after the death of our

President, we thought it wise, taking into consideration the circumstances in the country) the illegality of the National Assembly, the lack of dialogue between the people and the government) that if the leader of the National Assembly were to take over power, the situation would have been worse.⁸ He said the military conducted itself in a proper manner by shedding no blood and not arresting former ministers, backed by the fact that their action was supported by the Guinean people. &In our inaugural speech, we told the people that we took over to create the necessary conditions for peace.⁸ He explained that though they had proposed a transition period ending in December 2010, it is still negotiable, adding that they have already appointed a civilian Prime Minister.

On the CNDD, the Vice President said &it,s a consultative organ set up to verify and validate the laws proposed by the government.⁸ He reiterated that they have no intention of retaining power, and that though they understand the concerns raised by the international community, particularly the EU and the G-8, they needed time &for a mental re-orientation of the people⁸, which they wouldn,t want to do with brutality. He said political parties have already expressed support for the new regime, explaining that they would have to conduct local elections, to be followed by parliamentary polls, by which the elected Members of Parliament, forming the National Assembly, would have the responsibility to conduct presidential elections, after which the military would withdraw from politics.

After the statement, Vice President Sam Sumana responded by thanking the General for coming and hoped he had had fruitful

FREETOWN 00000608 002 OF 002

closed-door discussions with President Koroma. He prayed that what happened in Sierra Leone during the war would not happen in Guinea, while stating that &the people of Sierra Leone still see you as brothers.⁸

SLAJ President Umaro Fofanah gave the vote of thanks, but not before sneaking in a question in French (after the Information Minister made it clear that no questions would be entertained) about the coup, to which General Camara replied that theirs was not a coup d,etat but a &take-over⁸ to fill a vacancy.

The Guinean delegation comprised both military and civilian officials, among whom were Lt. Col Matturi Bangura, Col. Bambou Fofanah, Commander Amadou Dumbuya, Alhaji Demba Fadiga, Lt. Madjou Djibate, and Khalifa Nyias.

Other Sierra Leonean government officials present at the ceremony included Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation Minister Zainab Bangura, Presidential & Public Affairs Minister Alpha Kanu, Defence Minister Paulo Conteh, Finance Minister David Carew, Health & Sanitation Minister Soccoh Kabia, Energy & Power Minister Afsatu Kabba, Ag. Transport & Aviation Minister Allieu Pat Sowe, Minister of State Vice President,s Office Balogun Koroma, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation Vandi Minah, Deputy Minister of Mineral Resources Ignosi Koroma, Deputy Minister of Information Mohamed Koroma, and Deputy Minister of Tourism Hassan Mansaray.

The junta leaders spent about two hours at Lungi before departing.

Meanwhile, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi may spend New Year,s Day in Sierra Leone, as he is expected to arrive in Freetown today for a four-day official visit which could include discussions with the new Guinean leaders.

13. (C) Comment: Given Sierra Leone's demonstrated commitment to democracy, the GoSL's failure to announce the expectation that Guinea will conduct free and fair elections as soon as possible is disappointing. Per reftel B, President Koroma

discussed the need for a peaceful and democratic transition with the press while attending Lansana Conte's funeral. Not reiterating that message at this time could be an indicator that Wade and Qadhafi are pressuring the GoSL to accept the junta as a legitimate government. Though Koroma seeks to be seen as a leader in the Mano River Union and larger region with regards to good governance and human rights, his major actions to date involved issues outside of West Africa, such as condemning the elections violence in Zimbabwe and supporting the UN Somalia piracy resolutions. We have been told by President Koroma's closest advisor that Sierra Leone will not engage in further talks with Camara. A crumbling resolve when faced with conflict in his own backyard could undermine his credibility as an independent voice for democracy with the U.S. and other allies. End Comment.

PERRY